

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 6175

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, AS
SUBJ: NEIL BATT ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR
PARTY

1. SUMMARY. NEIL BATT, DEPUTY PREMIER OF TASMANIA, HAS
BEEN ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY TO
REPLACE BOB HAWKE. ACCORDING TO CONSERVATIVE FIGURES IN
THE ALP, BATT IS "ON SIDE" ON MOST ISSUES AND CAN BE
COUNTED UPON TO TRY TO MODERATE ALP POLICY. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING THE PERTH CONFERENCE OF THE ALP IN JUNE 1977,
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND SHADOW MINISTER
FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS MICK YOUNG HAD THE NECESSARY
NUMBERS TO REPLACE BOB HAWKE AS PRESIDENT OF THE ALP.
YOUNG WAS TALKED INTO WAITING FOR ONE MORE YEAR BEFORE
MAKING A RUN FOR PRESIDENT BY JOHN DUCKER AND OTHER
MODERATE ALP LEADERS. YOUNG AGREED, BUT EVENTUALLY
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FORCED HAWKE'S HAND IN JUNE OF THIS YEAR, REMINDING
HIM OF THEIR 1977 UNDERSTANDING. HAWKE THEREUPON
ANNOUNCED HIS RESIGNATION AS PRESIDENT OF THE ALP WHILE
MAINTAINING HIS POSITION AS PRESIDENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL OF TRADE UNIONS (ACTU). IN THE INTERIM, HOWEVER,
YOUNG'S LEFTIST SUPPORTERS LED BY SENATOR ARTHUR GIETZELT,
DESERTED HIM AND THIS LED NEIL BATT TO DECIDE TO MAKE HIS

RUN. THE MAIN REASON THAT THE LEFT ALONG WITH OTHER ALP EXECUTIVE MEMBERS DROPPED THEIR SUPPORT FOR YOUNG WAS THAT YOUNG WAS CONSIDERED TO BE TOO ACTIVIST AN INDIVIDUAL, LIKELY TO SEEK TO DOMINATE THE FEDERAL EXECUTIVE AND LIELY TO SEEK INTERVENTION IN STATE ORGANIZATIONS OPERATIONS, ESPECIALLY IN QUEENSLAND AND WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

(YOUNG WAS AN EXTREMELY ACTIVE AND EFFECTIVE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ALP BEFORE HE ENTERED FEDERAL PARLIAMENT. IN 1970, HE WAS HEAVILY INVOLVED IN FEDERAL ALP INTERVENTION IN VICTORIA.) YOUNG, REPORTEDLY INFURIATED BECAUSE HE THOUGHT HE HAD BEEN GUARANTEED ELECTION THIS YEAR, ATTEMPTED TO CONVINCE HAWKE TO RUN AGAINST BATT. HAWKE REFUSED BECAUSE HE DID NOT HAVE NUMBERS.

3. NEIL BATT, 41 YEARS OLD, HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN TASMANIAN POLITICS SINCE 1969. EARLY IN HIS CAREER HE HAD THE REPUTATION OF BEING ON THE LEFT WING OF HIS PARTY LARGEMLY BECAUSE HE LED ANTI-VEITANM WAR MARCHES IN TASMANIA. IN THE INTERVENING YEARS, AS MODERATE FORCES LED BY FORMER PREMIER NEILSON AND PRESENT PREMIER DOUG LOWE GAINED INFLUENCE IN THE TASMANIAN ALP, BATT'S POSITION MODIFIED AND HE HAS SINCE MOVED CONSIDERABLY TO THE RIGHT. ACCORDING TO JOHN DUCKER, BATT CONSISTENTLY HAS SUPPORTED EVERY ISSUE OF KEY IMPORTANCE TO MODERATE FORCES IN THE ALP SINCE JOINING THE FEDERAL EXECUTIVE.

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4. BATT'S ELECTION COMES AT A TIME WHEN ALP PROSPECTS IN AUSTRALIA ARE GREATLY IMPROVING. AS REPORTED IN CANBERRA 5768, THE ALP RECENTLY WON AN IMPORTANT BY-ELECTION IN NSW. PRECIPITOUS STATE ELECTIONS WILL PROBABLY BE HELD IN NSW IN OCTOBER OF THIS YEAR WHEREIN THE ALP IS GENERALLY EXPECTED TO DOUBLE ITS MAJORITY IN THE LOWER HOUSE WHILE HAVING A GOOD CHANCE OF GAINING A MAJORITY IN THE UPPER HOUSE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY YEARS. SHOULD THE ALP WIN THE STATE ELECTINS IN VICTORIA LATER ON THIS YEAR (OR EARLY NEXT YEAR), THE PARTY WILL CONTROL FOUR OF THE SIX AUSTRALIAN STATE GOVERNMENTS -- STATES WHICH CONTAIN MORE THAN 80 PERCENT OF AUSTRALIA'S POPULATION. BATT'S FIRST IMPORTANT DUTY WILL INVOLVE THE VICTORIAN STATE ELECTIONS WHERE HE WILL PUSH FOR THE VICTORY OF MODERATE ALP OPPOSITION LEADER FRANK WILKES. SHOULD WILKES WIN, BATT, DUCKER, TASMANIAN PREMIER DOUG LOWE, AND BOB HAWKE WILL USE THIS RESULT AS FURTHER EVIDENCE

EVIDENCE THAT A MODERATE APPROACH IN AUSTRALIA IS THE ONLY ELECTORAL APPROACH POSSIBLE FOR A PARTY TO GAIN FEDERAL ECLECTIONS. THEY WILL STILL FACE A DIFFICULT TASK IN SELLING THIS PROPOSITION IN QUEENSLAND AND WESTERN

AUSTRALIA, BUT IT WILL GREATLY STRENGTHEN THEIR HANDS.

5. ADDITIONAL BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON NEIL BATT
FOLLOWS.
ALSTON

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